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Winter adaptive sports trips give Soldiers new opportunities

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO



Winter can be a tough time for anyone to get outdoors and be active. The motivation drops even more when you have a medical condition that limits your mobility.

To help keep the wounded, injured and ill Soldiers of the Warrior Transition Battalion active this winter the unit has coordinated with ski resorts throughout Colorado for winter adaptive sport camps.

“These trips are an opportunity for them, no matter what their condition is, to be able to do things they love, or always wanted to do,” said Becky Richardson, the WTB adaptive sports coordinator. “

Adaptive sports often parallel existing sports played by able-bodied athletes, but there may be modifications in the equipment and rules to meet the needs of the participant.

“It is all about adapting the sport so that everyone can do it,” said Richardson. “It may not be the way they used to do things, but there is almost always a way to be able to do it.”

At the beginning of December Richardson and a group of Soldiers spent a week in Breckenridge to take part in the 28th annual Hartford Ski Spectacular, one of the nation’s largest winter sports festivals for people with disabilities. Around 800 people from across the United States took part in the festival.

"Each individual had their own instructor who spent a day with them teaching them how to ski or snowboard," said Richardson, who is an adaptive and regular snowboard instructor. "The Spectacular also offered half day clinics for biathlon, curling and sled hockey."

Sled hockey was familiar to the Fort Carson WTB Soldiers as the unit has weekly sled hockey clinics and matches at Memorial Park's Setich Ice Center. The rules for sled hockey are the same as regular hockey, but the participants are on sleds, and use two short hockey sticks to propel themselves across the ice and to control the puck.

"In January, we also went to Crested Butte for an adaptive skiing and snowboarding trip," Richardson said. "My goal is to have one trip a month to different locations so that the Soldiers will see that there are lots of resources available to them, even when they get out of the military."

For Chief Warrant Officer 3 Justin Bernache, a WTB Soldier who is currently on transitioning from the Army, the Crested Butte trip allowed him to fulfill a long time dream of his – to ski.

"I was born and raised in Tidewater, Virginia, and went skiing as a kid and loved it and have always wanted to do it since," said Bernache. "The skiing really relaxed me and took my mind off my day-to-day struggles due to my disability."

"One of the reasons that I love these trips is because I can see how they change people," said Richardson. "They learn new skills or have to learn new ways of doing something they already knew, but either way their confidence in themselves, and what they can do, grows."



A WTB Soldier hits some powder in Crested Butte during a week-long winter adaptive sports trip to the Colorado ski resort. Photo courtesy of Adaptive Sports Center at Crested Butte.